

# The Open Mike<sup>District 2</sup>

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A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 3, Number 6

November 2007

## **A Moment at the Mike**

# Name Your Poison

In late October—October 29, to be precise—Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley called the Maryland State General Assembly back into special session. At the moment, the governor and state legislature are working to find ways to resolve the state's pending \$1.7 billion budget deficit, with the General Assembly considering a comprehensive package of budget cuts, revenue increases, and other policies needed to bring the budget back into balance.

I talked about this in the last issue of [The Open Mike](#), but it's worth discussing again, for the decisions that will be made in Annapolis in the coming weeks—and perhaps months—will have lasting impacts on our county. Balancing the budget is hard work; the issues before our state leaders are daunting and every change in taxes or cuts in spending affects someone, somewhere. Let's take a look at what's being proposed, and what it means for Montgomery County residents -- and why you should be concerned about it.

In an attempt to start the discussion, the governor has proposed a number of bills to reduce spending, modify the tax code, raise revenue, and even increase investments in a number of programs. His proposals include an increase in personal and corporate income taxes, an increase in tobacco and sales taxes, and a new targeted tax and fee increases to pay for unmet transportation, health care, and education needs, as well as some reduction in state property taxes. The governor has also proposed a slots package to raise additional revenue and close the budget deficit—a controversial proposal, to be sure.



**Councilmember Mike Knapp**

Montgomery County is the economic engine on which the State of Maryland runs. But that also means we're often looked at as a well that never runs dry, to be tapped repeatedly even during a

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# Name Your Poison

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drought. Certainly we're generous people in our county. As it is we send quite a bit to the State each year—and on average, we only get back about 18 cents for every dollar we send to the State's tax coffers. As I said: generous.

As the General Assembly considers these revenue proposals, there's been a lot of talk about progressive taxes and tax fairness. Certainly, that sounds level-headed on the face of it, as a progressive tax is generally one that requires the wealthy to pay more or higher taxes than the middle class, and so on. But once the numbers come out, I think a lot of us in Montgomery County will be shocked to discover who's really considered wealthy. While Montgomery County residents do, indeed, have the highest average personal incomes in the state, we're also the most expensive county when it comes to cost of living. That makes a real difference in determining just how wealthy you might be.

According to the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, twelve of twenty-four counties in Maryland have costs of living well below the national average. Of the twelve counties with costs of living above the national average, Montgomery County is at the top of the list, with a cost of living 13 percent above the national average—in fact, no other county even comes close. You might be earning more in Montgomery County, but it doesn't go as far. If a so-called progressive tax doesn't take cost of living into account, it should.

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**A whopping 81 percent of the new revenue generated by the governor's proposal will have come from Montgomery County residents alone. How fair does that progressive tax sound now?**

As work continues in Annapolis, there are a number of possibilities on how the governor's proposals might be received. Certainly, the legislature can do nothing, but such inaction comes with a price. At the present rate, the counties stand to lose \$867 million in state funds—including a loss of \$86 million in state dollars in Montgomery County. Without that state funding, the county government will have to find a way to come up with the resources necessary to close that \$86 million gap—no small task, especially when declining county revenues will likely make it difficult to continue funding county programs even at their existing rates.

If that sounds like a problem—and it is—there's more.

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A more likely scenario is that the legislature will reach an agreement of some sort to close the deficit either immediately or over a number of years, likely through a combination of targeted tax increases and spending cuts. But a closer look at the governor's proposed revenue package should give our legislators pause. While the budget deficit does indeed close, they're balancing the budget on your back. Under the present proposal, Montgomery County residents will be burdened with an additional \$92 million in income taxes. That means that a whopping 81 percent of the new revenue generated by the governor's proposal will have come from Montgomery County residents alone. How fair does that progressive tax sound now?

Additionally, the current proposal not only takes more money from your pocket, but gives you less in return. For example, under proposals currently being considered, the state could pay less of its

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**"Enough is Enough."****Knapp Moves to Abolish Clarksburg Development Districts**

For nearly three years, the County Council has been studying the legality, practicality, and viability of development districts as a financing framework for new development in the Clarksburg community. Responding to concerns raised by the Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee, county government has undertaken a number of initiatives to address various questions relating to the creation and use of the Clarksburg Development Districts.

As part of its investigative effort, the County Attorney and the County Executive examined the process undertaken to implement the Clarksburg development district. The staffs of the County Council and the Office of Legislative Oversight also thoroughly reviewed the development district law and implementation processes. This report was released publicly on September 18, and is available on the Council website. The Council has also held a briefing and two follow-up worksessions in the council's MFP committee.

Enough is enough. The Clarksburg community needs to move ahead without additional bureaucratic delays. We need to end the ongoing mess in Clarksburg and we need to do it now. It's been more than three years of chaos and delays.

On November 13, I introduced legislation to abolish the Clarksburg Town Center Development District. Further, I intend to introduce a resolution to modify and clarify the Development District Act to ensure better implementation and oversight in other, and future, development districts.

I fully understand that we are investigating additional funding streams for infrastructure and I intend to keep the development district tool in our toolbox. But in order for it to be effective, there are a series of legislative and policy modifications that need to be made. Specifically, we need to look at the development districts and how they relate to other sources of funding, infrastructure eligible for development district funding, and clarification of notification requirements.

I believe we've studied and agonized over the issue enough; eventually, you've got to stop hand wringing and move forward. This Spring, the Planning Board will approve the Clarksburg Town Center amended site plan that came from the plan of compliance. When that is approved, we need to ensure there are no outstanding issues, and that we can move forward to implement the plan expeditiously. I believe by eliminating the development districts, we give the community the opportunity to move ahead and finally begin to realize the vision that is Clarksburg.

***What Is A Development District?***

A development district is a special taxing district created to finance infrastructure items that are required to serve new development.

The policy of using development districts is not new; the first were approved by the County Council in the mid-1990s. They were used first to fund a portion of the infrastructure in West Germantown, and were later identified for use in Clarksburg. In both instances, development districts were identified for use prior to any development in these communities.

Development district bonds are funded by special taxes and assessments levied on property located in a district, and are *not* an obligation of the County itself. A decade ago development districts were proposed as a way to have new development pay for itself, with both the developers and new residents who were the beneficiaries of the infrastructure contributing to the projects.

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**"Complete abstinence is easier than perfect moderation." - St. Augustine**

## ***Dry in Damascus: An Alcohol Primer***

The Upcounty community of Damascus is the only dry town in the county -- meaning the sale of alcohol is strictly prohibited in the town limits. There are no county liquor stores, and you can't buy it anywhere else -- you can't even order it with a meal in a restaurant. Residents are mixed on how they feel about it, but all would probably agree it's one of those quirks that makes the community such an interesting place to live.



How did it get that way, though? Tales vary, but one thing *is* for certain: it's prohibited by state statute, specifically under Public General Laws of Maryland, Article 2B, 8-216 (a)(2)(i), which states:

"...a license for the sale of alcoholic beverages authorized in this article may not be issued for any place of business located in Damascus (12<sup>th</sup> election district)..."

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## **Name Your Poison**

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share for teacher retirement, which could cost the county upwards of \$150 million annually, and reduce its commitment to higher education programs at Montgomery College, along with other cuts. While doing nothing could cost our county \$86 million, **a solution could end up costing Montgomery County nearly \$300 million.**

I spent some time in Annapolis talking with legislators about this very point. I also spoke with County Executive Ike Leggett, who shares my concern that new revenue proposals could impose an unfair tax burden on the county. I'm continuing to encourage our representatives in Annapolis to consider tax reform and revenue increases carefully to ensure that Montgomery County residents don't bear a disproportionate share of the tax burden.

Last month, I asked for your views on this predicament, and you responded (see page ). I encourage you to keep right on talking—let your State representatives know how you feel, and drop the governor a line as well. This is your money they're talking about, after all; you deserve to have a say in how it's spent. Ultimately, we're all in this together. I'm interested in knowing what you think. Send me your comments, or give me a call at (240) 777-7955. It's my pleasure to serve.

Regards,



Mike Knapp  
Councilmember, District 2



# Damascus

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Actually, Damascus can trace the prohibition of alcohol back to the time when it was first designated as the 12th election district in the county. Up until the late 1800s, there were only five voting districts in Montgomery County -- five places where residents could go to cast their votes on election day. In the late 1800s, however, the county divided these voting districts into smaller, more manageable parcels, to give residents a place to vote that was a bit closer to home. In 1884, Damascus was designated as Election District Number 12. Shortly thereafter, county residents went to the polls -- and Damascus eagerly awaited its first time as an official voting district.

At this point, I'll turn the story over to the late E. Guy Jewell, who wrote the story of Damascus in a 1976 article in the now-defunct *County Courier*. Jewell was a longtime Damascus resident -- and, in fact, served as principal of Damascus High School from 1929 to 1938. In his 1976 article, he provided a lengthy history of the town, using information he'd gleaned from years of living in town and talking with residents, and included a bit of background information on why alcohol is *verboden* in the town limits. Here's Mr. Jewell:

Compiled from the stories of old-timers, the first election in Damascus was quite a celebration. Word was spread that the party would be an open house. The pills were set up in the Odd Fellows Hall, which was where the fire house stands today. This was before the days of paper ballots.



**A detail from *The County Election (1851)*, by George Caleb Bingham.**

The election judges sat behind a table with tally sheets before them. Each voter stepped up and audibly announced his vote. As he stepped off the end of the line he was offered a tin cup filled with the product of King's distillery.

This factory was located in the King's Valley area between Damascus and Clarksburg. The owners had agreed to help out the gala occasion by bringing up a barrel of their best distillate. This was laid across a pair of saw horses with a spigot inserted in one end. The brew was drawn off into one of many tin cups, loaned for the purpose by the local merchant who then occupied the building on the corner in front of the present Shell gas station [now Citgo].

The refreshment was so well received that about mid-morning one of the voters decided to go through the line again, now that the early rush of voting had ended. His action was soon copied by others.

The judges had, of course, been well served with refreshment. The activity went along very

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# Damascus

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pleasantly until about noon when the barrel was emptied. The hosts announced that a re-supply was on the way up the hill by cart....

Afterward lunch was served at the various homes of the village, all of which were sharing in the community celebration. When the cart arrived it held more than one barrel, as even then Damascus citizens tried to prepare for eventualities. Voting resumed at a lively rate as several visitors had appeared to observe the festive affair. They were from the other bank of the Patuxent, from Kemptown, and from around the railroad station at Mt. Airy. Some also came over from Clarksburg to see how the new polling place was operating. In the neighborly spirit which, then as now, characterizes Damascus, they were invited to partake of the voting and refreshment, even though most of them resided in Howard, Frederick, or Carroll counties.

When sun set the voting closed, but not until the last barrel was emptied did the party slow down. The judges counted their tallies and filled the score sheets which were taken to Rockville the next day to the office of the Election Supervisors. One look there at the sheets caused the raising of quite a howl. More votes were reported from District 12 than there were residents in Montgomery County.

The sheriff was called in and asked to make a study of the situation and recommend suitable further action. The permanent closing of the new polling place was the mildest punishment mentioned.

The sheriff duly visited Damascus, although his official duties seldom took him there. After a day of investigation, even at the source of the joviality, he made a short factual report, recommending that the polling place be retained as he had carefully instructed the judges in the correct way to run their offices. Since this had not been done before he saw no reason to prefer any charges of malfeasance against the judges.

He recommended only that the tally figures from Damascus for this election be disregarded -- and except for one item, this recommendation was approved. There was one question on the ballot: 'Shall the sale of alcoholic beverage be forbidden under local option in the twelfth election district?' The tally sheets showed a strong majority voted 'yes' and to this date Damascus is a dry district.

Parenthetically, we should add that the question was again put after the repeal of the prohibition amendment to the national Constitution. Local option and the prohibition of liquor sales was carried in Damascus again.

How true is the tale? At this point, it's hard to say; like any story passed down through the years, the edges tend to blur while other points sharpen. One version of the story even has a drunk voter falling into a pig pen and being eaten in the process -- an ending *Hannibal* novelist Thomas Harris would likely appreciate.

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## ***Drinking in Damascus: Frequently Asked Questions***

So, Damascus has been dry for a long time -- so long, in fact, that many new residents are uncertain what really is and isn't allowed. Can you serve alcohol at a dinner party in your home? Can you give it as a gift? Can you serve it at a wedding reception at the Damascus Recreation Center? My office regularly receives calls like this -- and fortunately, we've got the help of Kathie Durbin with the Montgomery County Department of Liquor Control to help us answer your questions.

### ***What does the statute actually prohibit?***

The statute states that a license for the sale of alcoholic beverages may not be issued anywhere in the 12th District, which includes all of Damascus and some Gaithersburg and Cedar Grove addresses.

### ***Does that mean I can't serve it at a private party?***

Not at all. You can serve alcohol to your guests in your residence, provided you're not making them pay for it (that would fall under the definition of a "sale"). Your guests may also bring alcohol with them -- the statute in no way prohibits guest from giving you a bottle of wine as a gift, or bringing a case of beer to a party at your house.

### ***What if I'm having a fundraiser with an open bar? I'm not selling it then, am I?***

Actually, under the law, you *would* be selling it. If people pay to attend an event -- even if that payment is a donation to a cause -- an open bar would be considered as part of the costs of the event. That constitutes selling. In most parts of the county, all you need is a permit to allow for an open bar at an event. But in Damascus, that's still not allowed.

### ***I'm having a wedding reception at the Damascus Recreation Center. Can my guests at least drink a toast using champagne?***

Sorry, you can't drink that toast. At the moment, alcohol is *not allowed* at the Damascus Community Recreation Center at all.

However...

I've been informed that the Department of Recreation will be meeting with the Department of Liquor Control in the near future to revisit this issue and discuss what will and will not be permitted, and to issue formal policies. I'll keep you posted when I know anything.

### ***What about events at the American Legion in Damascus?***

Damascus American Legion Post 171 presently holds a Class C, Clubs License which permits alcoholic beverages (Beer, Wine, and Liquor) to be consumed by members and their guests on its premises. The sale of alcoholic beverages at this location remains prohibited.

### ***I heard the Fire Department can now serve alcohol at events. Is that true?***

Yes. The State legislature recently granted a Special Class C beer, wine, and liquor license to a "bona fide fire department in Damascus," allowing for the consumption and sale of alcohol on the premises.

## **MCPS Modifies Site Plan for New Middle School**

### **Feasibility Study Will Look At Possible Locations in Clarksburg**

Montgomery County Public Schools Superintendent Jerry Weast recently announced that the proposed new middle school for the Clarksburg-Watkins Mill region will be located in Clarksburg instead of Montgomery Village, as originally proposed.

With the opening of Clarksburg High School, Neelsville Middle School (NMS)—which is just down the road—now finds itself lying within the boundaries of both the Clarksburg and Watkins Mill clusters. The result is a “split articulation,” in which students at NMS could be sent to different high schools. To keep students grouped as close to their home districts as possible, MCPS originally proposed building a new middle school that would serve only the Watkins Mill Cluster, leaving NMS to serve solely the Clarksburg Cluster. As a result, MCPS tasked a site selection committee with determining the best location for the proposed Watkins Mill Middle School #2.

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**Site selection will begin next year, with a committee of parents and school personnel determining whether the school should be built in Arora Hills or elsewhere.**

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In its initial study, the site selection committee determined that the best location for Watkins Mill Middle School #2 would be the Centerway Local Park site in Montgomery Village, a former MCPS property now under the stewardship of Park and Planning. Reaction to this proposal was mixed, and after further conversation with families in the Clarksburg and Watkins Mill clusters -- and further examination of enrollment projections -- MCPS agreed to modify its initial request and explore locating a new middle school in Clarksburg.

According to MCPS, the site selection process will begin next year, with a committee of parents and school personnel determining whether the school should be built in Arora Hills, on a site set aside by the developer for such a purpose, or whether there might be a better

location.

I've been to a number of community meetings and have spoken with residents, parents, teachers, and representatives from both the Watkins Mill and Clarksburg clusters about the site recommended for the new school, and I'm pleased MCPS agreed to go back and reconsider its own recommendation and look at all alternatives.

There is still much that needs to be discussed, however, as MCPS looks to address the problem of split articulation, as the new middle school will affect more than just the Watkins Mill and Clarksburg clusters. It will also likely affect Damascus and Seneca Valley. After the feasibility study is completed next year, the recommendation will be forwarded to the school board for further consideration. While the Council is not directly involved in the site selection process, we will still need to look closely at the impact of the new location before formally moving forward with funding.

As always, I'll keep an eye on things as they proceed--and I encourage you to continue to let the Montgomery County School Board, MCPS, and the County Council informed of your concerns as this project moves forward.



## **News You Can Use**

### **Germantown Master Plan Update, Planning Documents Now Online**

While the County Council isn't formally scheduled to begin looking at the Germantown Master Plan until next Summer, I'm always pleased to hear from residents about what they like and dislike about their community, and where they think things could be improved. Keep those comments coming -- whether you live in Germantown or not -- as your comments are one of the best and most helpful tools we have as we work our way through changes to the original 1989 plan.



***The Germantown Public Library***

Not familiar with the master plan or how it works? Not to worry -- the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission has devoted a corner of its website exclusively to the Germantown Master Plan. You'll find not only the Germantown Master Plan itself, but lots of good information such as planning policies, and approved (and pending) projects and development.

You can see all this and more at: <http://www.mcparkandplanning.org/germantown/index.shtm>. And my thanks to Park and Planning for making this information available in such a convenient format.]

## **Making A Difference**

### ***"Project Change" Earns Major Award from Freeman Foundation***

The Gaithersburg-based non-profit organization [Project Change](#) -- a partnership of high school students and adults committed to improving their community by providing positive opportunities for youth -- received the \$260,000 Joshua M. Freeman Tribute Grant from the [Carl M. Freeman Foundation](#) at a ceremony at Tusculum Farm on October 13.

"For 10 years, Project Change has done amazing things with virtually no financial resources," said Robyn Holstein-Glass, Project Change's Executive Director. "Project Change has grown to its present level of respect and accomplishment through a highly dedicated group of youth and adult volunteers, and this grant represents an amazing opportunity to more fully realize our mission. Thanks to the Carl M. Freeman Foundation, our youth can see firsthand that they really do have the power to help improve their community."

Project Change was founded in 1998 by four Sherwood High School students and is now a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Project Change announced that it intended to use the award to fund the Joshua M. Freeman Youth Initiative (FYI), which will be a living, vibrant and sustainable way to carry forth Josh's vision for a stronger Olney and a model for communities everywhere.

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## **Chairman's Corner**

### **Education Committee Looks at Facilities, Achievement Gap**



The Council's Education Committee -- which I chair -- will continue its oversight responsibilities throughout the autumn by looking at staff development funding and policies at MCPS, and the use of MCPS facilities, including their use for activities that are not directly school-related. We'll also discuss Montgomery College enrollment projections, as well as the forecast on the amount of space the college needs to continue to meet the needs of a rapidly-growing student population.

Finally, we'll look at the request submitted by MCPS to the state for construction funding--a matter that will only increase in importance as state and local budgets reach the stretching point--and review a new report from the Office of Legislative Oversight on how we're doing on addressing the achievement gap.

### **Education Committee Schedule**

The information is subject to change, so please check the Council's website as dates near for updated information. Unless otherwise indicated, all committee meetings will convene in the 7th Floor hearing room of the Council Office Building.

DATE	TIME	MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION
<b>November 19</b>	<b>10:15 a.m.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Briefing on Montgomery College enrollment projections</li> <li>- Briefing on Montgomery College facilities, campus master plans and space deficits</li> <li>- Resolution regarding MCPS State funding request for school construction</li> <li>- OLO Report on Achievement Gap, Part 1</li> </ul>
<b>November 26</b>	<b>2:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Joint HHS/ED Committee Meeting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Briefing on Kennedy Cluster Project</li> <li>- Transportation for Children in Foster Care</li> </ul>
<b>December 3</b>	<b>9:30 a.m.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OLO Report: Compliance of MCPS' Facilities with Environmental Laws and Regulations</li> <li>- MCPS Facility Maintenance</li> <li>- Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF) - Use of school space for youth outreach activities</li> </ul>



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## **The Upcounty Road Scholar**

### **Studies Underway on New Hampshire Avenue and Norbeck Road**

Got a road that needs repairing? A traffic light that's out? Is there a street or intersection that you think needs a stop sign or crosswalk? One of my responsibilities is to make sure someone knows about it -- and to do what I can to get you information on your question or request as quickly as possible.

I stay in regular contact with the [Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation](#) (DPWT) and the [Maryland State Highways Administration](#) (MSHA), and provide each agency with a list of projects that need addressing in the Upcounty. Both agencies receive countless requests each week, and getting a response back can take some time. So bear with me -- if you don't see a particular project listed here, that doesn't mean it has been forgotten or neglected, but rather that I haven't received an updated report on its progress this month.

With this in mind, the Road Scholar section of The Open Mike provides an opportunity to give you the latest information received from DPWT, MSHA, and others on the progress of requests that have been submitted on your behalf. It's also an opportunity for you to [let me know](#) of other projects that may need to be undertaken in your community.

### **Maryland State Highway Administration**

**Intersections of MD 650 (New Hampshire Avenue) at MD 97 (Georgia Avenue) and MD 28 (Norbeck Road) at Peach Tree Road:** Just a brief update: to address concerns expressed by *Open Mike* readers about safety, visibility, light timing, and traffic speeds at these two intersections, MSHA has informed me that it is evaluating each intersection to determine the best possible recommendations for safety measures at these locations. These evaluations usually take about 90 days to complete.

I hope to have more to pass onto readers in late January, so keep reading.

### **Project Change** continued from page 9

The FYI program will provide teens in the Greater Olney community opportunities for safe activities, appreciation for the advantages available to them, and "paying it forward" through community service and philanthropy. By incorporating community service and philanthropy, the Freeman Youth Initiative will be a community-wide youth initiative consistent with Project Change's guiding principle that privilege must be earned rather than taken as an entitlement.

The Carl M. Freeman Foundation is a grant-making organization that provides funding and capacity-building support to nonprofit organizations in the communities served by the Carl M. Freeman Companies. Last summer, to honor Joshua M. Freeman and to celebrate the Carl M. Freeman Companies' 60th Anniversary, the Carl M. Freeman Foundation invited nine area nonprofits, whose missions Josh strongly believed in, to apply for a one-time grant of \$260,000. Project Change was one of those special organizations.

For more on Project Change, visit <http://www.projectchange-md.org/>.

For more on the Carl M. Freeman Foundation, visit <http://www.freemanfoundation.org/>.

## **A Special Edition of Vox Pops**

### **The State Budget Shortfall: Open Mike Readers Respond**

In last month's Open Mike, [I asked for your views on the state's \\$1.5 billion budget shortfall](#), and the difficult decisions that would need to be made to ensure not only that our legislators can close the gap, but also that any proposal does not unfairly require Montgomery County taxpayers to shoulder a disproportional share of the burden. You responded loudly and forcefully -- and excerpts from some of the comments I received appear below.

Our legislators are continuing to meet in Annapolis (see the lead story, above), so keep writing! Thanks to all of you who have responded so far. Now, over to you . . .

#### **'County Tax Credits Are Already Too High'**



"You wrote very eloquently about the major budget issues facing our state and how the General Assembly may likely make up the state's structural deficit by providing less resources to counties. Your point that if we want and expect Montgomery County to provide the same level of services and resources for all the things we use and enjoy, then the money has to come from somewhere.

"I appreciated receiving the \$221 one-time county tax credit in 2006 and the \$613 credit on my principal residence this year. These tax credits offset the increased tax that we incurred due to increasing assessed value. Our actual out-of-pocket tax payment remained within \$10 in 2006 and in 2007 from what it was in 2005. What concerns me is that I think the credit this year was too high. The county just isn't going to be able to sustain this level of tax credit year after year, especially in light of the state's budget crunch and dire predictions of significantly less state tax revenues coming to Montgomery County.

"I think it would have been better to give a smaller tax credit in 2006 so the shock of compounding the increased tax due to increased assessed value would not be as great year-to-year . . . Worse, I feel that with the credit crunch that many homeowners are experiencing, this situation may result in even more defaults on mortgages, foreclosures, and an increase in people being displaced from homes in our county. -- Rocky, Silver Spring

#### **'Scrub the Budget Thoroughly'**

"I have a few thoughts and comments that may be controversial or at least provoke discussion. I notice that in your Open Mike newsletter, the article that followed the State's structural budget deficit was about \$1.5M of drought relief paid for by the County. Have you taken a hard look at similar non-core budget expenses? For instance, since I am not a farmer, I do not know how many County residents would benefit from your proposed aid . . . I would hope that the County staff has made this analysis available to you so that you are in a good position to assess the relative value and importance of proposed additional expenses. . . . My overall point with this discussion is to point out that we need to scrub the County budget [of] these types of expenses before we ask our residents to pay more taxes or approve other revenue enhancing measures such as slots. Having done this budget scrub, you will be in a much stronger position to make a case for additional revenue if it is still needed." -- Steve



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## Vox Pops

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### 'Looking for Revenue? Stop Funding Programs for Illegal Residents'

"As in every other communication from our state politicians, we are told that taxes have to go up. I get increasingly disgusted and quite frankly, extremely mad as I read over and over of the impending tax increases in Maryland, I find this doubly disgusting because out of one side of your mouths, you are telling us our taxes are going up, and on the other side, you are telling Casa De Maryland, they can have more and more and more. . . . You need more money? STOP THE FUNNELING OF OUR HARD EARNED TAX DOLLARS TO CASA DE MARYLAND AND OTHER ILLEGALS SUPPORTERS AND START DOING THE JOB WE ARE PAYING YOU TO DO!!

"As we think to the future, we will need some place to move to that cares about taxpayers if this crop of self serving turncoats don't get voted out during the next elections, so are always happy when other areas show signs of creating areas worth living in, as our own area is becoming unliveable." -- *Betty*

### 'Have Realistic Expectations, and Develop New Programs Carefully'

"I appreciate your honest and thoughtful comments about our budget. Clearly there is no magic solution. There will probably be a combination of service cuts and tax/fee increases when all is said and done. Here in this county we have wonderful services . . . I think we have to be really careful about how we develop and expand services in Montgomery County. My favorite example is all day kindergarten. As originally proposed it was an excellent idea to help students in areas where it was most needed. You see what happened - we now have it everywhere regardless of whether it is needed or not. Keep up the good work and your excellent oversight." -- *Neal, Rockville*

### 'Property Taxes Are Already Overwhelming'

"If I can remember the timing, before Martin O'Malley became Governor of Maryland, there was supposedly a huge windfall of money that the politicians apparently didn't put toward infrastructure or current needs. It appeared to be a feeding frenzy and everyone wanted to spend the money, both republicans and democrats. Now, a short time later, we have a huge deficit in Maryland. I can't help but feel that decisions were made without thinking through the long term impacts. I'm a firm believer in being fiscally responsible, in both my personal life and in government. I'm a life long resident of Montgomery County, and have been saving for retirement, and want to stay in Montgomery County. I have been a full time employee in the County my whole working life. I have also been a volunteer in Montgomery County and care about keeping it a safe and beautiful place to live. However, with the County's recent reappraised property values, and continuing tax increases, I may not be able to stay here." -- *Sharon, Boyds*

### 'Are We Taking Advantage of Business Development?'

"Mike, I read your recent Open Mike and making up lost state funds will be a challenge. Has the [County Council] considered looking at the flow of revenue to ensure we are collecting all that is due to the county? This area is so heavily populated with residence and businesses it wouldn't appear we would have a problem. I'm not against paying my fair share as long as I'm paying my fair share. Also, will business development help with this problem? Is [the county] doing all it can to promote business in the county?" -- *Richard, Germantown*



## Fire and Rescue Service Offers Winter Safety Tips

### ***Check Smoke Alarms; Use Care with Heaters, Fireplaces, Candles***

*As cool temperatures embrace the Metro area, the men and women of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service offer Open Mike readers some safety tips.*

The fall season and the approaching winter months are typically the busiest time of the year for firefighters. Cooking, home heating systems, heating equipment and associated electrical systems, as well as holiday decorations too close to a heat source, continuously are a significant factor in structural fires in Montgomery County. Many of these fires can be prevented. The following fire safety tips and information can help you maintain a fire safe home this winter.

- Be sure your heater is in good working condition. Inspect exhaust parts for carbon build-up. Inspect electrical systems for overloads.
- Never use fuel burning appliances without proper room venting. Burning fuel such as kerosene, coal or propane, for example, produce deadly fumes.



***If you must keep the home fires burning, dispose of ashes wisely.***

• **Kitchen Fires.** Most kitchen fires occur because food is left unattended on the stove or in the oven. If you must leave the kitchen while cooking, take a spoon or potholder with you to remind you to return to the kitchen. Never cook with loose, dangling sleeves that can ignite easily. Heat cooking oils gradually and use extra caution when deep-frying. If a fire breaks out in a pan, put a lid on the pan. Never throw water on a grease fire. Never use a range or stove to heat your home.

• **Space Heaters.** Buy only Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) approved heaters. Use only the manufacturer's recommended fuel for each heater. Do not use electric space heaters in the bathroom or around other wet areas.

Keep young children safely away from space heaters -- especially when they are wearing nightgowns or other loose clothing that can be easily ignited. Do not dry or store objects on top of your heater. Keep combustibles away from heat sources. Give space heaters space!

• **Smoking.** Don't leave smoking materials unattended. Use "safety ashtrays" with wide lips. Empty all ashtrays into the toilet or a metal container every night before going to bed. Never smoke in bed. Don't smoke when drowsy.

• **Candles.** Keep burning candles out of children's and pet's reach; keep matches and lighters out of sight and locked away. Make sure they are in stable holders. Do not leave candles unattended -- especially around children or pets. Do not place candles near draperies or anything that might easily catch fire. Make sure you put out candles when you go to bed or leave the home.

• **Fireplace Ashes.** Remember: never discard hot ashes inside or near the home. Place them in a metal container outside and well away from the house. Have your furnace and chimney professionally inspected and cleaned. Chimney tar build-up can ignite your chimney, roof and the whole house.

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## Safety

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• **Change Your Clock – Change Your Battery.** You changed your clocks back on November 4; did you change your smoke alarm batteries as well? Get into a lifesaving habit - when you change your clock, change your battery. It only takes a moment, and the \$20 you spend on batteries is a worthwhile investment to keep you around.

Working smoke alarms save lives. Ensure you have a working smoke alarm on each floor of your home. Additional smoke alarms can be placed in sleeping and kitchen areas. Test your smoke alarms monthly, and change the battery when you change your clock twice a year. If your smoke alarms are powered by your home's electrical system, consider installing battery powered smoke alarms as a back up in case of a power outage.

Changing smoke alarm batteries twice a year is one of the simplest, most effective ways to reduce tragic deaths and injuries from fire. In fact, working smoke alarms nearly cut in half the risk of dying in a home fire. For more information, or if you are a Montgomery County resident and would like a free home safety evaluation, call the *Safety in Our Neighborhood Home Inspection Hotline* at (240) 777-2476.

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## County Council Public Hearings Calendar

### Spending Affordability, Sign Permit Fees Up For Discussion

Don't be shy! The County Council regularly holds public hearings at which we actively seek your input, thoughts, comments, and suggestions. The policies, amendments, and legislation under consideration aren't just pieces of paper; they have a very real impact on you and the lives of your fellow citizens. For this reason, residents are always encouraged to attend the public hearings and give us your views.

Hearings are held in the Council's main meeting room on the 7th Floor of the County Office Building at 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville. ([Click here for a map.](#)) If you wish to testify on any of the items listed below, please call (240) 777-7931.

One more thing -- the hearing schedule can change rapidly, so always check the [County Council's home page](#) to get the most up-to-date information.

DATE	TIME	MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION
November 27	1:30 p.m.	Supplemental appropriation, Arts and Humanities Council NDA: - \$200,000 for the Arts and Humanities Council
December 4	1:30 p.m.	Spending affordability guidelines for FY09 Operating Budget
		<a href="#">ZTA 07-15</a> : Signs - Permit Fees



## Ombudsman

The September 2007 issue of *The Open Mike* contained an article on the federal funding of the Germantown Biotech Project ( "[Wynn Secures Funding for Germantown Biotech Project](#)") which failed to give appropriate credit to other members of the Maryland Congressional delegation who championed the funding of this project -- most notably [Congressman Chris Van Hollen](#), who advanced the initial funding request. *The Open Mike* regrets the error, and thanks Congressman Van Hollen for his support and advocacy for this important project.

## **Community Bulletin Board**

### ***Local Toastmasters Invite You To Practice Public Speaking Skills***

The Town Center Talkers -- Germantown's Toastmasters public evening club--invites any residents interested in honing their public speaking and leadership skills to attend any of their regular meetings.

The Town Center Talkers meet the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:15 p.m. in the community room of the OBA Bank in Germantown. The OBA Bank is located at 20300 Seneca Meadows Parkway.

As Toastmaster KH Edwards explains, "Toastmasters is all about providing a friendly place to practice public speaking and growing leadership skills."

For more information, call (301) 540-7670, or visit their website at <http://www.towncentertalkers.org/>.



## ***Step Up To The Open Mike -- Subscribe!***

*The Open Mike is an electronic newsletter published semi-monthly by Councilmember Michael J. Knapp (District 2). If you would like to be added to the electronic distribution list, please subscribe by going to:*

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*...then be sure to indicate you'd like to subscribe to information from Councilmember Knapp by checking the appropriate box.*